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UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/40/622
11 September 1985

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fortieth session
Item 114 of the provisional agenda*

QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR

Progress report of the Secretary-General

1. In my last report (A/39/361), dated 25 July 1984, I informed the General Assembly of the consultations I had undertaken with the Governments of Indonesia and Portugal, with a view to contributing to the improvement of the humanitarian situation in East Timor and to promoting efforts towards a comprehensive settlement of the problem. I indicated that, as a result of those consultations, contacts had been initiated between the two countries, through their Permanent Representatives in New York. I also stated my readiness to continue to be of assistance in the search for a comprehensive settlement.

2. Since that date, I have actively pursued my consultations, either directly or through Under-Secretary-General Rafeeuddin Ahmed, who has been assisting me in these endeavours. During a visit to Portugal from 8 to 10 August 1984, I met with President Ramalho Eanes, Prime Minister Mário Soares and Foreign Minister Jaime Gama. After my return to Headquarters, I met, on 27 August, with Mr. Ali Alatas, Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations.

3. From 3 to 7 September 1984, Mr. Ahmed visited Lisbon and was received by President Eanes. He also held consultations with Foreign Minister Gama and the late Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Defence, Mr. Carlos da Mota Pinto.

4. At the beginning of its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly, acting on the recommendation of the General Committee, 1/ deferred consideration of the question of East Timor and decided, on 21 September, to include this item in the provisional agenda of its fortieth session (decision 39/402).

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* A/40/150.

5. During the thirty-ninth session of the General Assembly, I continued my discussions with both sides. On 1 October 1984, Foreign Minister Mochtar Kusumaatmadja of Indonesia and Foreign Minister Gama of Portugal had an informal encounter, in the presence of Mr. Ahmed. Later that day, I met separately with the two Foreign Ministers, who briefed me on their discussions. Further consultations were held by Mr. Ahmed, who met separately with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia and a senior official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Portugal on 8 October.

6. As a result of these exchanges, it was decided that Indonesia and Portugal would begin substantive talks under the auspices of the United Nations in November 1984. It was agreed that these talks would commence with consideration of humanitarian issues, on the understanding that they would ultimately deal with the question in a comprehensive way, thus facilitating an internationally acceptable settlement of the question of East Timor.

7. The first round of substantive talks was held from 12 to 16 November 1984. The delegations of Indonesia and Portugal were led by their respective Permanent Representatives in New York, assisted by senior officials from the two Governments. Subsequently, Mr. Ahmed met with Mr. Mochtar, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, and Mrs. Maria de Lourdes Pintassilgo, Adviser to the President of Portugal, on 19 and 21 November, respectively. Later, in conjunction with his participation in an international conference in Yemen, Mr. Ahmed had a further exchange of views with the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, on 18 December.

8. From 7 to 9 January 1985, Indonesia and Portugal held a second round of talks. In the following weeks, I paid official visits to several countries in South-East Asia, including Indonesia, where I met with President Suharto and Foreign Minister Mochtar, on 4 February in Jakarta. Following my return to Headquarters, I met with Mr. Rui E. Barbosa de Medina, Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations, on 26 February.

9. The third round of substantive talks was held from 18 to 22 March 1985. On 27 March, I discussed the situation with Foreign Minister Mochtar of Indonesia. Subsequently, the Permanent Representatives of Indonesia and Portugal held three more rounds of substantive talks in New York, from 28 to 31 May, 24 to 28 June and 19 to 22 August 1985.

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10. The substantive talks between Indonesia and Portugal centred on the questions of the repatriation of former Portuguese civil servants, the repatriation of certain East Timorese expatriates now residing in Portugal, religious freedom, protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of the East Timorese people, and economic and social conditions in East Timor.

11. As regards the repatriation of former Portuguese civil servants, 24 families, representing a total of 171 persons, have so far been identified as clearly eligible. It was agreed that their repatriation should be undertaken with the close co-operation and collaboration of the International Committee of the Red

Cross (ICRC). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has been approached regarding assistance in funding such a programme. Agreement in principle was also reached on the repatriation of a number of East Timorese expatriates who currently reside in Portugal and who wish to return to East Timor. Both sides further agreed that it was desirable to begin the movement of persons in both directions as early as is feasible.

12. On the question of religious freedom in East Timor, Indonesia gave assurances that there was complete freedom to profess and practice all religions, including the Catholic faith; that the Catholic Church in East Timor had full authority over the parochial school system; that the clergy had complete freedom of movement to carry out its apostolic duties, upon which no restrictions were placed; that the Catholic Church participated with other humanitarian organizations in the provision of humanitarian assistance to the population; and that foreign-born missionaries could enter the Territory, in accordance with immigration regulations.

13. Regarding the question of the protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of the people of East Timor, the specific influence of the Portuguese heritage was considered, and the ethnic and linguistic traditions were examined. In particular, Indonesia gave assurances concerning the protection of the linguistic and cultural heritage, including efforts undertaken to promote education and foster indigenous cultural activities in East Timor. In addition, information was exchanged regarding a number of monuments and historical sites in East Timor and the steps being taken for their protection and preservation.

14. Economic and social conditions in East Timor were also considered. Matters relating to the health, education and social welfare of the population were examined, with emphasis on efforts to improve the living conditions of the people of East Timor. In particular, detailed information was provided regarding construction of roads, bridges and other infrastructural development activities, public health, nutrition, food and cash-crop production and other agricultural programmes. Assurances were given by Indonesia regarding the food situation.

15. During the discussions, a number of other humanitarian issues were raised, including human rights questions. Information was supplied by Indonesia regarding, inter alia, the institution and results of trial proceedings for Timorese detainees as well as the recent release of a number of untried detainees, the situation of the displaced persons on the island of Ataúro and their resettlement to the main island, the protection and relief assistance activities of ICRC, and access to the Territory by international organizations and foreign visitors.

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16. The improvement of the humanitarian situation of the people of East Timor remains one of my primary concerns. To this end, I have continued to raise with the Government of Indonesia the question of facilitating the activities of international humanitarian organizations engaged in providing assistance and protection to the people of East Timor. In addition, I have stressed the need for improved access to the Territory for the purposes of, inter alia, assessment and verification of conditions prevailing in East Timor. In this context, I was

gratified to learn of the recent visits to the Territory by foreign journalists and diplomatic personnel. It is my hope that such visits can continue on a regular basis and that general access to East Timor can be further improved in the future.

17. During the past year, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has pursued the implementation of a special project of basic services for children, mothers and their families, undertaken in co-operation with the Indonesian Red Cross. The coverage of the project includes 66 villages in seven sub-districts. Special services for the most vulnerable groups, including provision of medicines and food supplements, remain a dominant feature of the project. The project also encompasses components of water supply and sanitation, community education regarding family nutrition and health, literacy training, income-generating activities, food production and village development.

18. ICRC has continued to carry out several programmes in the Territory for the benefit of the East Timorese people. The family reunion/repatriation programme, established by ICRC and carried out in co-operation with the Indonesian Red Cross, was continued throughout 1984. During the first part of 1985, the programme went on, although at a slower pace than in the past. There are still a few cases registered in this programme which are pending clearance for departure.

19. ICRC has also continued to carry out its protection activities by visiting detention centres holding East Timorese detainees. In early 1985, a new programme of three series of visits to detention centres per year was instituted, replacing the earlier four-phase programme. In the second half of 1984, under the auspices of the earlier programme, six detention centres were visited by ICRC in September and a follow-up visit was paid to the Comarca Prison in Dili in December. In April/May 1985, the first series under the new programme was carried out and four centres in Jakarta and Dili as well as Ataúro Island were visited.

20. The joint programme of ICRC and the Indonesian Red Cross for relief assistance in favour of the displaced persons on Ataúro Island has continued during the past year. The programme consists of general food distribution, the provision of supplementary food rations for vulnerable groups and some medical aid. Indonesia has continued to resettle the displaced persons to the main island. A total of 3,222 of the more than 4,000 persons who had been temporarily displaced onto Ataúro have already been resettled, the large majority of them to their villages of origin. At present, 1,188 displaced persons remain on Ataúro Island. The Red Cross Messages Service has continued to facilitate the exchange of family news for these persons and for detainees visited by ICRC delegates.

21. Also in connection with relief assistance in favour of the displaced persons, in April 1985 ICRC carried out a visit to the Ainaro/Dare region in East Timor, in order to assess the nutritional and medical situation of some 600 persons brought back from Ataúro Island at the end of 1984. It was found that some food and medical assistance was necessary. Upon the recommendation of ICRC, the Indonesian authorities and the Indonesian Red Cross have undertaken steps to ensure that the situation is remedied.

22. With regard to relief assistance activities on the main island of East Timor, as a result of discussions between Indonesian authorities and ICRC, ICRC was granted authorization to carry out a survey to assess the medical and nutritional situation, with a view to determining needs, if any. Accordingly, from 28 May to 16 June 1985, 25 villages in nine sub-districts, encompassing a total population of 41,000 inhabitants, were visited. The villages were chosen by ICRC.

23. The findings of ICRC indicated that, at the time of the survey, the nutritional status was, on the whole, satisfactory. In addition, medical care and conditions of hygiene were, generally speaking, considered to be statisfactory. As a result, it was determined that no emergency assistance was warranted for the villages visited. However, the attention of the Indonesian authorities was drawn to instances where there existed a possibility that food and medicinal shortages could arise in the coming months. It is my expectation that every effort will be made to counter such difficulties and that the Government of Indonesia will continue to co-operate fully with ICRC in this regard.

24. I shall continue to follow the humanitarian situation in East Timor closely, with a view to facilitating a steady improvement of conditions on the island.

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25. The substantive talks between Indonesia and Portugal have proceeded in a constructive atmosphere. Both sides have reiterated to me their willingness to continue the present process. It is therefore my sincere hope that, in the coming months, the next phase of the talks will build upon the measure of understanding already reached and that the consideration of the political, civil and other aspects of the problem will prepare the ground for a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable settlement of the question of East Timor.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-ninth Session, Annexes, agenda item 8, document A/39/250, para. 23.